

CHOOSING THE BEST SPARKLING WINE FOR YOUR WEDDING

By Eileen Crane, President and Winemaker of Domaine Carneros in Napa, California

Selecting sparkling wine for your wedding can be a romantic event in itself. Here are some suggestions for finding your ultimate beverage.

As an engagement party or other evening with friends, buy several sparkling wines suggested by your favorite wine shop or ask each couple to bring a bottle of sparkling they have enjoyed. Ask everyone attending the party to score each wine:

1. Great wine--really delightful
2. Good wine--happy to sip this
3. Just okay

Collect the scores and determine which wine had the greatest number of 1's. In buying sparkling wine for this party, allow at least one bottle for every two people.

Alternatively, you might purchase several bottles of sparkling wine that have been recommended to you taste them one per evening (or one a week) with your fiancée over dinner. Continue tastings until you both agree you have found the right one. My husband and I began tasting a different sparkling wine every Friday night years ago to find our favorite. It was so much fun we continued the Friday night tasting tradition long after we were married.

If you live near wine country or are planning to visit, a terrific way to select your wedding bubbly is to visit two or three different sparkling wineries and try all the styles they make such as Brut, Rosé, Blanc de Blanc and Blanc de Noir. Pick your favorite for your special day.

Serving sparkling wine optimally follows simple guidelines:

- A bottle (750 ml) of sparkling wine will serve 5-6 glasses.
- The best glasses for sparkling wine are flutes or tulips. Specify either type when ordering wedding glassware.
- Sparkling wine should be served well chilled--overnight in a refrigerator or one hour in ice.
- Sparkling wine should be poured only as guests are ready to drink it. Pre-pouring may mean the wine will have warmed up too much.

- Sparkling wine is essential for the wedding reception and toast. Allow 1-1/2 to two glasses per person for an hour reception--more if your friends love wine.

Serving sparkling wine exclusively throughout the reception and the meal itself is elegant and festive (and simplifies the types of glassware you need to order). Allow half to two-thirds of a bottle per person.

While most people like their sparkling wine Brut in style, weddings may include guests who like a slightly sweeter wine. You can accommodate them by purchasing cassis syrup or framboise syrup and adding about a teaspoon of this to the bottom of the Champagne glass before pouring the sparkling wine.

Sparkling wine makes wonderful thank you gifts to bridesmaids and groomsmen or other friends who have helped with the wedding. Extra bottles can be used later to celebrate when friends who could not attend the wedding come to visit.

Make sure you have a set of Champagne flutes on hand for ongoing dinners or parties. Add them to your bridal registry list or order them from Domaine Carneros.

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